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The Widow Robinson

AND OTHER SKETCHES

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THE
Abbey Press
PUBLISHERS
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FIFTH AVENUE
London NEW YORK Montreal

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY WIFE

FOR WHOSE SAKE THESE SCENES OF VILLAGE LIFE

WILL BE HELD FOREVER DEAR

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WIDOW ROBINSON.

I.

The Arrival of Widow Robinson.

In the spring of 1856 the Widow Robinson moved to a village lying on the banks of White River, Roxbury, Vermont. She was, as all strangers were, kindly received by the villagers, and her little boy, James, became the pet of the place.

Her cottage was some hundred feet from the main road and was shaded by fine old elms. "Seven Acres" was the name it had borne for a generation, but the widow was no sooner fairly settled than a neat sign with "Providence Cottage" painted on it was nailed to a large tree in front of the house.

Widow Robinson.

For the first year of her residence at Seven Acres (for the villagers still persisted in so calling the place) there was much curiosity to learn her history. Nothing further was known than that she had come from Nantucket and that her husband had died about two years after her boy was born.

The cottage soon attracted attention by the skillful and artistic way in which the garden was kept. In fact, go by it when you would, the owner might be seen arranging the vines and flowers.

Many of the villagers called to pay their respects and all wondered why the widow should have selected such an out-of-the-way place. "Just suppose," said Mrs. Salem Mansfield, "you were to be sick in the night, what ever would you do? And, besides, don't you know the place is haunted?"

This was news indeed to Mrs. Robinson, but she replied: "I have bought the place and intend, by God's help, to occupy it."

Its reputation as a haunted house explained

why the children of the neighborhood avoided it, which was hard for James, for a lad in his eighth year needs companions. But he was a brave, patient fellow and worked in the garden with his mother, rendering efficient help. In less than a year Seven Acres, which had always been a dreary spot, became "like the garden of Eden," so the lovers of flowers declared.

Mr. Carter, the minister of the Congregational meeting-house, was a frequent visitor at Providence Cottage, and was always made welcome. He remarked to his wife, however, that there was something strange about Mrs. Robinson, for she never asked him to tea or even to call again. "I will," he exclaimed, "find out, if possible, about her history, for there is something very mysterious about her. I have asked her to call upon us, but she always makes some frivolous excuse. My duty is plain," he added resolutely, "I must, as a minister of God, urge her to come to Christ, for I fear she is in darkness."

"Why should you think so hardly of her?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"Well, my dear, she displays such remarkable skill in evading my questions."

"She is a woman of refinement, is she not?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what?" asked Mrs. Carter, her curiosity aroused.

"Yes, she is well versed in everything appertaining to this life, but oh, my dear wife, I am afraid she is a great sinner; for, when I asked if we had not better have family prayer, she hurried out into her kitchen, saying her preserves were boiling over. I was shocked to hear that she worked in her garden on the Sabbath."

Mrs. Carter was indeed scandalized and knew not what to say. This, then, accounted for the minister's abstraction ever since his visit to Mrs. Robinson's, the day before.

"Well," said he, after a moment's silence, "let us trust in God and pray for her and for that dear boy."

The Arrival of Widow Robinson.

He had barely done speaking when Mrs. Field "called to see the baby," so she said. After presenting a pair of knitted socks to the youngster, she was, of course, invited to stay to tea.

Conversation flowed freely, and it was not long before Mrs. Field said: "My dear pastor, do tell me what you think of Mrs. Robinson. Don't she act strange? Just think, when I called there yesterday she begged to be excused because she had to hear the boy's lessons. Did you ever hear of such a thing, such a lame excuse? I tell you it will be a long time before I call there again. And, by the way, why don't she send her boy to school? I'll have the Squire go after her. I am afraid she's no acquisition to the village. Do you think she is really a widow? I have my doubts. I should like to know, too, where she gets all her money from. John says whenever she comes to the store she buys the best, the *very* best there's to be had, and plenty of it. Have you called

lately and talked to her about her soul and that of her child?"

"Yes, dear Mrs. Field, I have been there this very day, but she is so unmoved as regards spiritual things that it makes me feel sad, and just as you were coming in I told my wife that we must pray for her. I intend calling there next Sabbath, to see if she will allow the little boy to come to Sabbath-school. Would it not be well for you to call there on your way to church? It would be friendly to a stranger."

"No, indeed, I shall *never* go there again, or not, at least, until she apologizes for her rudeness."

"Oh, but, my dear Mrs. Field, that is not a Christian spirit. We must never be weary in trying to do good and in seeking to bring souls to Christ."

What Mrs. Field would have said in answer to this mild rebuke will never be known, for just then Deacon Field dropped in, not expecting to find his wife there. She made many excuses for not having gone home. Mrs. Carter,

in her pleasant way, set matters right by urging the deacon to stay and have tea with them, and Mrs. Field explained that the children would know where they were, as she had told them about the socks.

"Deacon Field," said the minister, "we have been talking about Mrs. Robinson. She has been living in the village some time now, but none of us seem to know much about her."

"Well, who can find out if the parson can't?" said the deacon, with a grim smile.

"We ought to do something," continued Mr. Carter, "for she lives like a heathen. I have called several times, but cannot seem to make any impression on her. However, I will never give up, for that's what God sent me into the world for. I do wish she would come to church. Can it be that she is going to die in her sins, that beautiful creature?"

This last remark brought the deacon's wife out in all her hatefulness of temper. "You don't call *her* a beautiful creature, do you? How *can* you, Mr. Carter? Where is your

taste? I'll tell you what she looks to me like. Some city upstart having her wits sharpened by being with fashionables, but beautiful—I guess not. The widow has charmed you, Mr. Carter. Don't you talk that way before the other ladies! It don't matter before me, Mr. Carter, but some of the others might get down on you for it."

The minister was bewildered when Mrs. Field first protested, then, as the full spitefulness of her remarks was understood by him, he hastened to say, "I was thinking of her soul, and how bright it would shine if the body were clothed in righteousness."

"That's a very good way to get out of it, Mr. Carter. I hope your wife is satisfied with the explanation. I shouldn't be if the Deacon had said it of Mrs. Robinson."

The minister's wife hung her head and clasped the baby a little closer as she said, "John need never make any explanations to me." Then, anxious to turn the subject, she

asked about Squire Mead, who had been quite sick.

It was eight o'clock before the deacon and his wife left. When alone the minister seemed to feel more and more sad. "I fear I spoke unadvisedly with my lips," he said, with a sigh. "It is most unfortunate that Mrs. Field should put such a construction on my words, for she will tell the story all over the village."

Mr. Carter was not mistaken. He heard of it several times during the week and was so annoyed by some of the remarks made to him that he reluctantly fulfilled his promise of calling on the Sabbath to take James to Sabbath-school. He was met with a prompt refusal. Mrs. Robinson informed him that Sunday was the day she had set apart to have her boy study botany.

Thus repulsed, the minister's heart was heavier than before, but he resolved to ask the prayers of the church on behalf of the widow and her son.

A year rolled away, and the mystery con-

cerning Mrs. Robinson was still unexplained. Everybody in the village knew her by sight, and many had sought to be neighborly and had sent her little presents from time to time of milk and eggs. Some farmers offered their services, or their men's, in breaking up the ground for cultivation. All such offers were refused, but in such a manner that the one who made it took no offence. The only time that work was done in the kitchen garden, save when Mrs. Robinson or James did it, was when some poor man, some stranger seeking food, had asked for work to pay for it. None such was ever turned away empty from Providence Cottage.

II.

The Widow's Surprise Party.

PERSISTENT and determined effort to learn more about Mrs. Robinson failed to solve the mystery surrounding her. At last the patience of the villagers was exhausted, and they began to endorse Mrs. Field's opinion, that she was no acquisition to the village. Then Squire Mead came to the rescue and, backed up by his wife, suggested to the minister that he and a few other godly persons should give the widow a surprise party.

The night chosen was all that could be desired for such a trip. The moon was at the full, and it was the time of year when Nature is regaining strength after the hot days of August. The clocks were striking eight as the

wagon containing the party reached the widow's gate. The team slowed up, as was befitting so solemn an occasion, and as they came to a stand-still the party was startled by the sound of a loud, clear soprano ringing out to a harp accompaniment. The music seemed to swell and roll out till it filled all space, and one could imagine faint echoes of the sweet notes from the far distance. The intruders were spell-bound and more than one recalled the fact that the place was haunted.

Squire Mead, as became the originator of the plan, pushed the gate open and was about to enter when another burst of music made him pause. The voice rose higher and higher, losing little of its volume as it ascended, and it seemed to lift the hearers up with it, rendering them speechless and trembling with suppressed excitement. At last the minister exclaimed, "This is none other than the gate of Heaven!"

The tune changed, and as they went up the path the words of a familiar hymn came, perfectly distinct:

The Widow's Surprise Party.

"O Lord, another day has flown,
And we, a lowly band,
Are met, once more, before Thy throne,
To bless Thy fostering hand."

There was a strong reluctance to going up to the house, but Squire Mead, taking the minister by the arm, again led the way, and the others followed. But now they met with an unexpected difficulty. Bruce was on guard and unchained. He planted himself squarely in front and his white teeth gleamed in the moonlight, while a low growl warned them. When the last note of the singing died away he gave three loud barks and ran to the rear, but no one felt safe in taking advantage of his manœuvre. They judged him rightly, for quick as lightning he was back and barking louder than before.

At last the dog succeeded in informing the inmates of the house that there was something unusual happening outside, and James came out. He knew the minister well, and some of

the others by sight, but, instead of welcoming them, he left them standing, at the mercy of the dog, and ran back to tell his mother.

Mrs. Robinson was surprised. "Why didn't you ask them in, James?" she asked when he had said: "Guess who's outside?" and, before she could answer, had announced the minister and Squire Mead. She went at once to the door and, extending her hand, expressed her pleasure at seeing them.

But, brought face to face with the woman they had spied upon and who, they had no doubt, was the sweet singer to whom they had been listening, their wits deserted them and they stood foolish and afraid. Just at this moment the moon, which had been under a cloud for a few moments, shone out in all its glory, and the vision of Mrs. Robinson, dressed, as she was in white, with her golden hair fallen and reaching almost to the ground, her hand extended, and her slight, graceful figure outlined against the shadow of the house, seemed indeed angelic and far removed from anything

connected with their errand. "It is good for us to be here," murmured the minister, but it is doubtful whether his companions followed his line of thought.

The tension was broken by Mrs. Robinson turning and stepping back for them to enter the house. This they did, shamefacedly, and hardly daring to lift their eyes to inspect the parlor, which, unlike most best rooms in the village, was the general sitting-room of the family. They gazed fixedly at the golden harp set on a rest such as was generally used for such instruments.

Mrs. Robinson did not return to the seat beside it, but, taking a more comfortable chair, asked her visitors how they came to think of driving out to her lonely dwelling. No one answered, though the avowed object of their visit (to talk to her about her precious soul) ought to have inspired them with courage. At last, Squire Mead said, "Madam, as the representative of the village, I deemed it my duty to call upon you, and I invited these friends to

come with me. On their behalf and on my own, I thank you for the warm welcome given us. As church members" (here there was a sort of general satisfaction not unmingled with apprehension evident on the faces of the party, though they felt Squire Mead was to be trusted)—"as church members, we feel in duty bound to call and invite you to unite with us in our effort to build up Christ's kingdom on earth." The company breathed more easily. Their confidence in Squire Mead had not been misplaced. He continued: "This warm greeting you have given us encourages us to hope that we shall often meet again. I cannot tell you how as pilgrims and strangers, tarrying at the gate, our souls rejoiced at hearing the sweet sounds of evening praise. Truly, our dear pastor said it was good for us to be here. Now, dear Mrs. Robinson" (the lady winced) "I speak for the party when I say this is the very gate of Heaven, and won't you sing again? So shall our hearts be strengthened and helped to battle with life."

Mrs. Robinson again assured them of a welcome and, as if to emphasize it said, "Before we sing again let us have some refreshments; you will not refuse?"

Hardly had she done speaking when James, accompanied by a little dwarf, entered with trays. Choice fruit and cake were offered and then large cups of milk. The refreshments were taken in silence. The presence of the dwarf added to the mystery, and she was closely scrutinized. When the eatables had been removed Mrs. Robinson addressed her: "Come, Ruth, tune up your harp for these good folks and let us sing a parting hymn." So it was the dwarf, not Mrs. Robinson, who was the musician. But, no; again they were mistaken, for Ruth was only the accompanist. It was Mrs. Robinson who sang:

"Thus far the Lord has led me on,
Thus far His power prolongs my days,
And every evening shall make known,
Some fresh memorials of His grace."

In spite of Mrs. Robinson's invitation to them to join in the singing, it is hardly necessary to say that not a bass voice was heard except the minister's. In fact, the other visitors were so wrought upon that, had they been women, they would have cried. As it was, there was a suspicious coughing and blowing of noses to hide unusual emotion.

At last the minister said: "Come, we pilgrims cannot expect to dwell in Heavenly places for long. We must push on, for we are still in the plain." As they passed out into the open air, he gazed rapturously upward, where the moon was still sailing through a well-nigh cloudless sky, and exclaimed, "Yonder is our Heavenly home."

Those who remember Mr. Carter recall more than one occasion when his face shone as did the face of Moses. This man lived so near his God that it needed but the suggestion of the glory that has long since been his for it to shine, reflected, on his face.

The minister was not alone in the uplifting

experiences of that night. The harp, an instrument peculiarly sacred by reason of its frequent mention in the Scriptures, had much to do with their rhapsodies; but this was not all, for the family they had just left were musicians such as these simple villagers had never before heard. All the way home they talked of the music. The minister and Squire, in almost the same breath, began quoting, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" The minister finished the text and the Squire added, "Yes, and when we heard the harp it seemed as if angels were coming down to dwell amongst us men."

No remark was made about the dwarf, though after the excitement had died down somewhat, each wondered who she was. Up to that time it had been supposed Mrs. Robinson and her son occupied the cottage alone. However, no questions were asked. The Squire owned, afterward, that he spent a restless night, half dreaming, half recalling, the events at Providence Cottage.

It might have been supposed that the strange

happenings were discussed throughout the village within short space of time, but such was not the case. Without conferring with one another, Mrs. Robinson's visitors maintained strict silence. Such wonders have happened even in New England villages. These men were true Christians, their experiences appealed to the stronghold of their hardy natures and lay far too deep to be made the subject of babbling wives or village gossips. Mrs. Carter was the only one who learned anything concerning the visit. She had been alarmed by her husband's unusual absence, and when it was so prolonged she became so apprehensive that Mr. Carter, on his return, had hard work to quiet her. She heard little of the story. All that she cared for was that her husband had returned safe, and that Mrs. Robinson was not the incarnate spirit of evil that she had feared, judging from all that had been said about the mystery surrounding her

The minister slept late the following morning and the Squire, not seeing him in his gar-

den as usual, called to inquire about him. Mrs. Carter said only that he had had a bad night and was resting quietly. At noon the Squire called again, and this time the minister met him. On being rallied concerning his love for sleep, Mr. Carter replied: "No, Squire, you are mistaken. I did not sleep at all last night. I was thinking and cannot yet realize how it is that one who, we had supposed, was living without Christ should have been able to take us up the mountain-top and permit us to hear the singing as it were of the angels of God."

But Squire Mead had come down from the Mount. "I hope, my dear pastor," he said, somewhat anxiously, "that you are not going crazy about what you heard and saw last night."

"No, no, dear Mr. Mead, I shall not go crazy, but I think never was there in this village a being who, through God's providence, could so influence the minds of the people and so aid the church to put on the beautiful gar-

ments in which she should be arrayed, prepared to meet the Bridegroom."

The Squire was not altogether deficient in humor and was tempted to make a jesting remark about a bridegroom and the widow, but the earnest look on Mr. Carter's face stopped him. He admitted that the scenes of the previous night haunted him and sleep had been impossible.

Mrs. Morgan, whose husband had been one of the party, called on Mrs. Carter that afternoon and, after hinting, asked boldly whether Mr. Carter had described the visit to Seven Acres.

"He has told me something about it," answered she, "but really I don't understand. John believes, I guess, that the occupants of Seven Acres were transformed last night, and that God was in very deed in the garden, for he says that never before in all his life has he experienced such an outpouring of God's spirit. He has been all night on his knees, praying God to reveal to him the meaning of

his vision of last night, for he declares that he was lifted up to Heaven and saw the angels of God. He has been crying out, "Unworthy, unworthy, that I am, give me a fuller baptism of the Holy Ghost!"

While they were speaking the minister entered, his eyes swollen as if with long weeping. He grasped Mrs. Morgan by the hand and said, "The Lord is in this place and we knew it not."

Mrs. Morgan made no reply. She was a quiet little woman, not given to extravagances in any direction. She went home thoughtful but, as ever with her, said, "We will let things be and if it be of the Lord He will show us in his own good time."

The Sunday following the minister seemed much oppressed and on giving out his text (Luke xxiv., v. 8), "And they remembered His words," was so affected that he had to stop before he began the sermon. At last he gained control of himself and repeated the verse. His sermon was personal yet exalted. It was longer

than usual, and the congregation was dismissed, for the first time in its history, without a closing prayer. But no one remarked the omission. Many date the great awakening from that Sunday.

III.

Dr. Galen's Summons.

THE weather-wise in Roxbury predicted a hard winter that year, and their neighbors so far believed them that they made everything ready in case it should come true. Harvests were safely secured, out-buildings put in good repair, wood was cut, roads were mended, nothing was left to the chance of an open season. As it fell out, the weather-wise were right and winter came with all its terrors. Snow was falling on Thanksgiving Day, but this did not keep the pious villagers from gathering in the meeting-house to thank the God of the harvest for all His mercies.

All had settled down to a Sabbath stillness when the clatter of hoofs was heard, and a stranger rode, full gallop, down the main

street. He shouted to the first person he met, "Where is Dr. Galen?"

Service had not begun and it so happened that Dr. Galen, having heard the shout, came out into the porch of the building, and was himself addressed with "Where can I find Dr. Galen?" Upon the reply being given, "I am he," the stranger asked, breathlessly, "Will you jump on this horse and ride as hard as you can to Seven Acres?"

"How will you get back?" asked the doctor.

"Never mind me, you mount and go quickly as possible, or you will be too late."

The doctor, being an expert horseman obeyed, and was soon flying through the village. Busy housewives catching a glimpse of him through kitchen windows wondered why he did not have his own horse. Some of them were quick enough to discover that he rode the one on which the stranger had dashed past but a short time before. Then they began to wonder how the stranger would get back through the storm. They knew it would be well-nigh

impossible for him to hire a horse unless he could prove a dire emergency, for the villagers regarded Thanksgiving as quite as holy a day as the Sabbath.

On arriving at the cottage the doctor learned that he had been summoned for Mrs. Robinson. His first glance told him the case was serious. The pulse confirmed his fears. He took from his pocket a little case of powerful remedies and administered something, dropping it most carefully. Again he counted the pulse, expecting it to improve apparently. Ruth watched him anxiously and at last asked how the widow was. The doctor shook his head. Suddenly the patient laughed loudly and then screamed. The sound echoed through the cottage. Then she raised herself up in bed and, looking the doctor full in the face, called out: "He's coming! See, he's coming!" She shivered and then repeated slowly, as if the words were dragged from her in agony: "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!"

Ruth was crying and looked piteously at the

doctor. "Delirium," he said bluntly. Mrs. Robinson sank back exhausted. Again the doctor opened his case and again dropped a liquid most carefully, pouring it quickly down her throat. Then he sat and watched a stupor growing deeper and deeper. He became alarmed and, on observing that night was closing in, suggested that a messenger be sent to the next village for Dr. Bliss, and that his own family be informed where he was.

There was some little delay in carrying out these directions and Dr. Galen's own chaise arrived about the same time that Dr. Bliss reached Seven Acres. But before the second physician had come there had been a decided change in Mrs. Robinson. Heaving a deep sigh, she opened her eyes and said, rationally and calmly, "The good Lord, for the sake of my fatherless boy and Ruth's sake, spares me. But, doctor, don't leave me until the shadows flee." This request was suggested doubtless by the motion of the doctor, who had merely turned to throw more light on the bed.

Dr. Bliss announced that the greatest danger was past, though, after hearing full particulars, as far as Dr. Galen could give them to him, it was decided that he should remain in attendance all night.

Morning came at last, and with it Dr. Galen, who found the patient so much better that it was not deemed necessary for Dr. Bliss to come again. On bidding his charge "Good-bye," she said, "Doctor, through God, you gentlemen have saved my life." Her grateful look made both the men feel shy, but they remembered it for many a day. Ruth was waiting to see Dr. Bliss to the door and as he was leaving the house she handed him fifty dollars in gold and asked if that was sufficient.

The doctor was amazed and protested that he could not accept so much. "My dear child," he said, "I am not in practice any longer, but when a brother practitioner asks me to assist him I gladly go and do all that I can. There must be some mistake about this. Go and tell your mistress what I have told you."

Ruth's eyes danced, and the first words made the doctor more confused than ever. They were these: "Dear doctor, you *must* take this money; it is mine, and Sister never questions me as to what use I make of my own."

The doctor offered profuse apologies, and Ruth put him at his ease by laughing and saying, "I am a little maid and it doesn't offend me the least bit in the world to be mistaken for my sister's servant, for I shall always serve her most faithfully. So no more apologies, doctor, and when Sister gets better you must come to see her as a friend."

Curiosity was rife in the village concerning the mysterious summons of Dr. Galen. The subject was discussed over the luscious turkeys and between the intervals of pie, but no clue was obtained to the stranger who had come from none knew where and gone none could tell whither. Some even took the trouble to call on Mrs. Galen next day, but she, like the minister's wife, who, by the way, was her

model in many respects, kept her own and her husband's secrets well. So the gossips remained in ignorance. Who the stranger was they may have eventually suspected, though by that time Mrs. Robinson's illness had almost been forgotten, so many other matters of interest had absorbed attention.

IV.

The Reformation of Tommy Mullins.

THE winter was fast passing away, the snows began to melt and soon the green herb appeared. All the village looked brighter, and with the cheeriness of spring came a kindliness of feeling, and several of the villagers became acquainted with Mrs. Robinson. As soon as the ground permitted of building, a new and larger barn was erected at Seven Acres and a new wagon and fine horses were purchased by the widow. She and Ruth might often be seen driving through the village.

Tommy Mullins, the wickedest boy for miles around, was engaged to look after the horse. He felt very proud of his position, for it was quite as much of a surprise to him as to his neighbors that there were persons in the world who would trust him. The good people of

Roxbury were generally "down on Tommy." They called him an idle fellow, which was strict truth. Tommy was the only son of a poor widow. He was not wicked, for, as his mother used to say, "Tommy ain't never done nothin' real bad in all his life." He did not rob orchards much oftener than other boys of his age, and he was not much more impudent than others. He played truant whenever he dared and joined in when the big boys set the district school teacher at defiance, but he did not earn his reputation for wickedness by any of these misdeeds. Tommy's offence was that he could not be persuaded to go to Sunday-school or church, and he said, openly and unabashed, that he didn't want to be a Christian. His mother was sickly and could go out to work but seldom, consequently, idle, wicked Tommy should have been her support. As a matter of fact, Tommy gave her every cent he earned and he did many odd jobs, even on his most idle days.

When Tommy first appeared in a new suit

the boys of the village jeered him and told him they would not work where ghosts were prowling around every night. Tommy hadn't thought of that and his heart grew faint. From time to time, henceforth, he saw goblins and was tempted to play truant from Mrs. Robinson's as he had done from school. But the real good in the boy showed itself. He loved his mother and this was a chance to earn enough to relieve her from actual want, so he whistled down his terror and remained steadfast at his post.

Mrs. Robinson watched the boy narrowly. She was not unacquainted with these stories told concerning Providence Cottage nor with the attempts to seduce Tommy, and she rewarded his faithfulness in such a manner that the boy became a manly fellow, devoted to her, and resolved to make something of himself because it would please his own and his mother's best friend. He went to church of his own accord, because he was proud to have his mother go with him neatly dressed and looking like other boys' mothers.

The Reformation of Tommy Mullins.

The little cottage owned by Mrs. Mullins had a mortgage of $100 on it, held by Mr. Niles. The interest had always been a heavy drain upon the poor woman, and more than once she had been pressed for the principal, Mr. Niles saying that he really didn't care to have such a small amount out on mortgage. He never dared to go so far as to foreclose, though, in common with the rest of the villagers, he regarded Mrs. Mullins as hopelessly shiftless and felt sure the cottage would eventually fall into his hands.

What was his surprise, therefore, when one morning the Widow Mullins presented herself in his office and said she had come to pay the mortgage. At first he did not understand, but supposed she meant the interest, which he had not had the chance to press for as usual. Upon being told that she really intended to hand over the principal, he raised his spectacles, looked her all over and said, "Why, who's dead?"

Mrs. Mullins failed to catch his meaning, so he put the question more plainly. "I want to

know which of your rich relatives has died, that you are so well off, all of a sudden. No, Mrs. Mullins, I don't want yer money; here, put it into the Savings Bank."

But Mrs. Mullins insisted that he should take it. It was no small satisfaction to her to do this, and a prouder woman never passed through Roxbury than she when she had received the proper legal paper, signed and sealed by Squire Mead.

It was supposed that Mrs. Robinson had relieved the Widow Mullins, but neither of the women ever told, nor did Tommy, for the excellent reason that he never knew.

From being an outcast Tommy grew in favor with church people, many of whom declared he would come out on the Lord's side. It took Tommy a long time to get over his dislike of them, and the boy was not so far wrong. While neither malicious nor vicious he had been condemned right and left and, until Mrs. Robinson trusted him, not a single one of all those righteous people in Roxbury had ever made any effort to help him overcome his idle ways.

V.

The Wayfarers.

In the early part of May an old man, accompanied by a little girl about twelve years of age, stopped at Providence Cottage and the man asked for some food for the child.

"Don't *you* want something to eat?" asked Ruth.

"I care not for myself," was the answer, "but, good lady, have pity on this motherless child."

"Is she yours?" said Ruth, glancing hastily from one face to the other to note a resemblance, if there were any.

"No," said he, "her mother was my friend. She died a few months ago, and I am on my way to Boston to find employment, and friends of the child, who, I have been told, are there.

I promised her mother I would not leave her except with them."

"Where is her father?" asked Ruth.

"Don't ask any questions, good lady." The old man's voice failed him and he turned to go. But Nellie had caught sight of food in the little room beyond, and something in Ruth's face promised sympathy, so she held back and said, "Uncle, don't get discouraged; we shall soon reach Boston. It isn't very far from here, is it?" she asked of Ruth.

"Not so very," said the hunchback, smiling, "but you will want something to eat beforehand, so come in and rest and get a good meal."

They accepted joyfully, and James stood in open-mouthed wonder that any one, especially a girl, should be allowed to eat so much. When they had finished Ruth packed up some food for them, gave the old man some money and, with cheery words, sent them on their road again.

About an hour after they had left, Tommy

Mullins ran in breathlessly, but soon told how he had seen an old man lying dead by the roadside and a little girl sitting by the body crying.

Ruth guessed at once who they were, and summoned all the help about the place to get things ready for bringing the old man to Providence Cottage. Tommy was not long in harnessing the horse, and Mrs. Robinson herself drove with him to the spot where the strangers had been seen. Although on the main road, it was far from any house and the child was so bewildered by what had happened that she had not thought of going for assistance. In fact, it was wiser, had she thought of it, to remain where she was and trust to passers-by.

The old man was not dead, but lay unconscious and breathing heavily. It was no easy task to lift him into the wagon, but this accomplished Tommy was despatched for Dr. Galen.

He made good time getting to the village and, being fortunate enough to find the doctor at home, arrived at Providence Cottage almost

as soon as Mrs. Robinson herself. Dr. Galen could do nothing for the old man, who lived but a short time after being brought in. During those few minutes, however, he regained his senses and seemed to recognize his surroundings. Then, with a smile of content, he closed his eyes and seemed to prepare himself for death.

It was Dr. Galen who told the story. He said the old man passed away praying. He prayed for all who had turned a deaf ear to his appeals for help and then invoked a blessing upon those who had taken pity on him. With a voice clear and steady he cried out, "Father in Heaven, raise up a friend for Nellie." And the friend she had had passed to his reward, to the mother who had confided the child to him. "Truly," said the doctor, "this man was filled with the Holy Ghost."

It was supposed that the village authorities would be notified, but Mrs. Robinson said "No." She sent for the joiner and gave orders for a simple coffin and directed that the old

man should be buried decently in the cared-for portion of the burying-ground. She herself attended the funeral, as did Ruth and Tommy Mullins, and Dr. Galen was there, respectful, as if the deceased had been known to him many years.

Mrs. Robinson also intimated to the doctor that Nellie was to remain at Providence Cottage for the time being, and asked him to see that they were left free from curiosity seekers. It was some days before the child could control herself sufficiently to tell about her mother or her past life. She did not know much, but Mrs. Robinson finally gleaned these few facts:

The old man's name was Sefton. He had known her mother, so she understood, when she was a child in England. Her name was Nellie Bentinck. They had lived in Nova Scotia. She did not remember her father. Somebody said he had gone away somewhere a long time ago. She called Mr. Sefton "uncle," only he wasn't her uncle, really, but he was so good to them her mother said she

might call him uncle. He was very poor. Her mother had been sick a long, long time. Mr. Sefton had some money, which he said he had been sent to give to them. Her mother cried when he told her that. He said he had had it years ago and had never spent any of it. It was gold, and Uncle had some of it still in his pocket, that he was keeping for her. When her mother was dying she had told Uncle to spend the money to get to Boston with Nellie and for trying to find out her friends. She had the names, which she gave to Mrs. Robinson. Uncle had promised to look after her always, and her mother had told her to be good to him and mind him and do just as he wanted her to do. He had gone to New York and then up to Albany, but he was trying to walk to Boston.

This was not all told at one time, but bit by bit Mrs. Robinson made out the story. Nellie cried bitterly and seemed to realize fully what it meant to have lost her only friend; but Ruth comforted her, whispering that God always

heard prayer and that the friend for which her uncle had asked Him would surely, surely, be provided. Ruth did not know her sister's plans, but she suspected them.

Mrs. Robinson wrote to Boston, though she had little hope of hearing from the friends whom Mr. Sefton and Nellie had expected to find. And she never did. However, while waiting she discovered a letter which pieced out Nellie's account of herself. Her mother was a lady who had been disowned by her family by reason of her marriage with a scapegrace. He was even worse than her family knew, and after years of misery the mother resumed her maiden name, for she would not have her child bear the ignominy attached to the other. Mr. Sefton had been a clerk in her father's employ and had been entrusted with a small sum with which to relieve the woman's actual necessities, could he find her. He emigrated to Nova Scotia, but it was years before he found Nellie and her mother. Meanwhile, he had obtained employment in the Govern-

ment service, where he remained until so enfeebled that he was dismissed. He had not been entitled to a pension, and the little money he had saved dwindled until he became virtually a pauper, but he never touched that which belonged to Nellie.

Late in the summer, as the villagers strolled one Sabbath afternoon into the old grave-yard they were surprised to see a new headstone, and on it, in raised letters, was this inscription:

ERECTED IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF

ARCHIBALD SEFTON,

WHO ENTERED INTO REST ON HIS SIXTY-FOURTH BIRTHDAY.

HE WAS TRUE TO HIS TRUST.

Mrs. Robinson paid the bill. She never took out formal papers of adoption for Nellie, but the child remained at Providence Cottage. Years afterward, to her own astonishment and the gratification of the villagers, for she was a

universal favorite, word came to Roxbury that Nellie was a great heiress. However, she was always little Nellie Bentinck to the good people, and she would not leave them except for a short visit to claim her own in England.

VI.

A Godly Marriage.

THERE was a great gathering at Elder Simmons, on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter. All the church folks were there and, it is needless to add, there was much gossip. The one who seemed the leading spirit of the feast was Deacon Field's wife. She rated the minister, also the Squire, for not having invited her husband to go with them the night that they went to call on Mrs. Robinson.

From words which, but for the lady's expression, might have been interpreted as a jest, remarks grew more and more heated until there was genuine wrangling which threatened to spoil an occasion that, in justice to their hosts, should have been free from any unpleasantness. At last Deacon Field came to the rescue

and said that he had not been asked because the parson and his brother officers knew well that he would not go under any circumstances. He could not do so after the cool manner in which his wife had been received at Seven Acres.

"Why don't you say right out that I was insulted?" demanded Mrs. Field. But the deacon's intention was understood by the company, and no one expected him to reply. Thus the discussion was dropped.

Taking it altogether, the affair was quiet and orderly. There was no dancing, card playing or whiskey drinking. In fact, it was a real religious ceremony and, with the exception of the gossip hinted at, all passed off well.

Elder Simmons' wife was a model housekeeper and Christian, a not unusual combination in New England, and as for the Elder himself those who knew him best said he was a man after God's own heart. Margery, the eldest daughter, who was given in marriage to Herbert Sutton, was the life and soul of the village.

Mingled with the congratulations was general sorrow for the loss which the village, and especially the church, would sustain by her departure. She had been a member of the choir, a teacher in the Sunday-school, a worker in every branch of church activity, a kind and generous neighbor as well as a dutiful daughter. Many a young man had recognized what she would be to the one fortunate enough to make her his wife and had competed for her favor, though this must not be construed as meaning that Margery was a flirt. She said she would marry only in the Lord. There were sundry quiet little smiles at this announcement among the women, for Herbert Sutton was long known to be the ideal lover in this regard.

Herbert had been given to God at the time of his birth, and it was so impressed upon him that he was not his own that from his earliest years he acepted his position and looked forward to a life in God's service. It was no struggle to him to dedicate his life to the cause

of missions in foreign lands. In his prayer for guidance he sought only the field where he should labor.

The wedding-trip was to Africa. The entire village saw them off, accompanying them to the railroad station seven miles distant, and, amid tears and embraces, wishing them God-speed. Some one said there were more tears shed that day in Roxbury than ever before or since. After they had gone the company, with one accord, held an informal prayer-meeting in the little waiting-room, calling down God's blessing upon the brave young servants who had left father and mother, friends and country, and had gone out, hand in hand, to work valiantly for the faith. They were the first missionaries from that part of the country, and, during the time of this story, they were the last. But for years they were remembered and prayed for by name in the village meeting-house and at the family altars of rich and poor in the community.

VII.

Roxbury Scandals.

Soon after the departure of the missionaries the village was disturbed from the quiet into which it was disposed to settle by an incident which seemed to the good folk a disgrace to the community.

Mr. Niles, though not a member of the church, was a trustee. He had studied law in early life and this fact, added to his apparently shrewd investments, convinced his neighbors that he was a man out of the common, albeit thoroughly trustworthy. He had lived in Roxbury ten years and had come to be trusted by the farmers for miles around, they bringing him their little savings for investment, or borrowing small sums to help them work their unproductive land. The lawyer advised for or against certain action with an openness that

disarmed all suspicion. Moreover, he saw to it that interest moneys were paid promptly, and every man received what was due him without question or bother.

Among other investments was the sum of $5,000 belonging to the estate of Zephaniah Wheeler. Mr. Niles reported that he had put the same into a building at St. Albans. Mr. Wheeler's daughter expressed herself satisfied and, after the manner of women, signed papers without any comprehension of their meaning, but on the word of her attorney.

The money had been left to her in such a way that she could, if she chose, draw the principal when she became of age. She did not trouble to do so, but, at the time of her marriage, her husband, who happened to be a St. Albans man, thought it would be more convenient to transact the business himself. He, therefore, applied to Mr. Niles for the transference of the papers. Meanwhile, through curiosity, he examined the register at the town hall and failed to discover any entry of a mortgage in the

name either of Emily Wheeler or of the estate.

He immediately summoned Mr. Niles to give an acounting, but before the day set for him to appear Roxbury was startled by hearing of his suicide. Scandals of this kind were not common in those days, and Mr. Niles's defalcations were sufficiently large to command widespread attention. Stolid as the villagers were on ordinary occasions, their wrath knew no bounds when the facts became clear. As the sinner had escaped they visited their anger upon his widow and daughter, who, from being looked up to and admired, became despised and heart-broken outcasts. When their affairs were settled and, be it noted, that they gave up everything and none remitted any portion of the sacrifice, they had not enough money left to take them to relatives in Rhode Island.

What would have become of them no one knew or cared; but, just as some of the most vindictive expressed their willingness to see them go to the poorhouse, some unknown

friend sent them one hundred dollars. Mrs. Niles stated that it was no one in any way connected with her husband's affairs, and the gift was not investigated. It is doubtful whether it would ever have been known who was the giver had not Squire Mead opened a letter by mistake. He found it had been intended for Mrs. Robinson, and in it Mrs. Niles mentioned the timely assistance and added some pretty harsh remarks concerning the church members of the village.

Mrs. Robinson was not so displeased as she had a right to be about the opening of her mail, for she was secretly glad that Mrs. Niles's comments should be made known. She had hesitated to speak her mind, but when certain gossip was brought to her and the secret was out, Mrs. Robinson may have been accounted somewhat less saintly, but she relieved some in the community from thinking her a fool and blind to their failings.

A chronic scandal of Roxbury was the family of Mr. Mansfield, the village blacksmith and

leader of the choir. Roxbury knew nothing of Mrs. Jellyby. Few of the villagers approved of novel reading, and it is doubtful whether outside of Mrs. Robinson's house a copy of Dickens could have been found. But, nevertheless, Mrs. Mansfield was a New England counterpart of the character over which the world laughed and sighed in those years.

Mrs. Mansfield was the one who had first taken the news to Providence Cottage that, under its old name, Seven Acres, the home was haunted. She was a godly woman and felt it not only her duty but a privilege to visit the sick and the afflicted, also the widows and orphans. Her husband was universally respected and genuinely pitied by the women, for his wife loved so to work for the Lord that her children received but little of her attention. It was no uncommon thing for Mrs. Mansfield to absent herself from her home for days, her errands of mercy to other villages being considered as imperative as those near her own door.

The result was that Hezekiah Mansfield was a poor man. He never complained, however, and his daughter Hannah was the mainstay of his house. Despite the mother's indifference to her household the members of her family loved her dearly and believed that it was their duty to sustain her in the good work she felt called upon to carry on. But there were those in Roxbury whose hard, common sense rose superior to such sentiment, and Mrs. Mansfield's conduct was the subject for much gossip, various mild protests, and Mrs. Robinson once let fall that she thought it a scandal.

VIII.

What Others Had Left Undone.

NICHOLAS GREEN, the joiner, said of Mrs. Robinson, "She is the most elegant lady I ever laid eyes on!" This opinion, however, was formed at a respectful distance, for he had never spoken to the widow, nor had any special means of observation. Nicholas was a queer character, one not uncommon in those days. He believed firmly that all things worked for good to those who loved God, and that what was to be would be and he acted on his beliefs in a way that was frequently exasperating to those who, perhaps, held the same opinions, but did not carry them into practice. He had much to say about the interference of the church folk with Mrs. Robinson's affairs, and rebuked them for it in his own mild fashion. "Ye ort not to meddle," he told them, "nor to talk about her. Ef she's to be saved the Lord'll save her in his own good time, and

she'll cast in her lot with the people of God, naturally, so don't you worry. Ef she's one of the elect she'll come into the kingdom, an' ef she ain't, there ain't no sort of use a-tryin' to get her to jine the church."

Nicholas had as much curiosity as any of his neighbors to know more about the widow, but, as may be guessed from his remonstrances with them, he had the soul of a gentleman, and would not intrude upon her privacy. "Ef it's so ordered that I'm to meet the lady, I'll be sure to meet her, don't you be afeard to the contrary," he told his wife. Thus he went about his daily work and sure enough "it was so ordered" that he should come into close relations with Mrs. Robinson.

It happened in this way: Just as the family were about to sit down to dinner one day, a wagon drove up to his door. Nicholas caught a glimpse of two ladies seated therein, and between them his little daughter, whom he had been expecting every moment from school. At first he thought something must have hap-

pened to the child and that she had been brought home, but this fear was quickly dispelled by the little girl jumping from the wagon and runing toward the house. She told him excitedly that she had met the two ladies on the road and they had asked her where Nicholas Green lived. "I told them you were my father," said she, "and I would bring them here, so they asked me to jump in and ride along with them."

Mrs. Green was very much flustered by the arrival of company at such a time, especially as she saw who her visitors were (Mrs. Robinson and Ruth), but Nicholas invited them in with the graciousness of a lord and further, asked them to sit down and have some dinner with them. To his surprise and his wife's consternation, the invitation was accepted. It was some small consolation to Mrs. Green that her pot-pie was perfect that day, and her housewifely soul glowed with pride when her guests accepted a second helping each, praised the dinner and said it was the best they had ever

tasted in the village. Mrs. Robinson cast a look of reproach at Ruth, who made this remark, though it was strictly true, since neither of them had ever before sat down to any table in Roxbury except their own.

"I came to see you on a little matter of business," said the widow, as she rose from the table. Taking from one of those capacious pockets with which women were blessed in those days, a roll of paper, she spread it before the joiner and added, "I have bought the Ford place and am going to build a dozen houses for persons I know hereabouts—some of those charcoal burners down in the woods. Their houses are worse than our cowsheds, Mr. Green."

"Well, there ain't no need for 'em to live in that way," said Nicholas; "it's a free country."

"Yes," said Mrs. Robinson, "but they're not Americans like you and me, Mr. Green, and they don't know how to live decently, I reckon" (Mrs. Robinson tried hard to speak colloquial-

ly, but she could not twist her tongue to "I guess").

"Just as you say, ma'am," answered Nicholas, "ef it's the Lord's will to pervide fer 'em in that way I ain't sayin' nothin' agen it."

"The men are not lazy," said Mrs. Robinson, "and so I've a mind to help them, more for the women and children, though, than for the men themselves. They drink too much to suit me."

"So they do, so they do," was the reply; "but ef it's so ordered that they shall come an' live like decent folk, so be it, I says."

"Well, Mr. Green, I want you to build me a dozen good houses—nothing grand, but comfortable all through. I want good work, good lumber, good everything. You can charge me what you think right and make out the bill either by contract for so much or for days' work."

Such an order had never before been given in Roxbury, and the joiner could not believe his own ears. When the full magnitude of the contract became clear to him he stam-

mered out that no one man could build a dozen houses, and hadn't she better send to Boston or Albany for workmen. But here Mrs. Green, keenly alive to the wealth such a commission would give, reminded her astonished husband that her father and brothers were all joiners, and there was no reason on earth why they couldn't do the work themselves. "An' then, Miss Robinson, it will be well done, never fear, for Nicholas an' my folks is jest alike, they can't do work too good, no matter how little is paid for it."

Mrs. Robinson understood the situation exactly, so, with a few words of encouragement and an expression of unbounded confidence in Nicholas, she left with her sister.

It was not many hours before the news was carried through the village. It was not received with the enthusiasm with which such an announcement would have been hailed in a European community. There were not wanting some who looked with suspicion upon a rich patroness, while others dreaded the offer-

ing of a premium for shiftlessness. The Squire called a meeting of the prominent men in the village and undertook to select families who should benefit by Mrs. Robinson's generosity. These worthy men were soon informed that they were to have nothing to do with the management or disposition of the gift, and that the families had all been chosen. To the lawyer who hinted something about the feudal system and lords palatine, Mrs. Robinson gave the information that the houses were not to be rented, but were eventually to become the property of each occupant, provided he proved capable of using it aright. Tommy Mullins said he had heard her say she wanted these poor charcoal burners to live like Christians, which speech somewhat mollified the grumblers.

Again Mrs. Robinson's refusal to identify herself with the church caused her motives to be severely questioned. But she found her champions even among the church officers. Hezekiah Mansfield went so far as to say on the meeting-house steps that it didn't matter

whether she belonged to the church or not, she was doing Christ's work, and therefore she was a child of God, whether or no. The minister heard, and, though the words were like a dash of cold water, could only reply that he wished she would come into the fold. Seth Johnson, a young man who "wavered" in his adherence to strict orthodoxy, was emboldened to add his quota to the conversation, and it was this: "The church-folks has done the praying an' Mrs. Robinson has done the watching an' the working." Seth knew who it was that had erected the stone to Archibald Sefton, and that was part of the "watching" he had in mind.

IX.

Quilting Party at the Stebbins'.

THADDEUS STEBBINS was believed to be the richest man in the county. For this reason, if for no other, he would have been a prominent man in Roxbury, his native village. But there were other reasons why he attracted attention. He was what would have been called in England, and is now called here, "a gentleman farmer;" but in those days the title, had it been conferred upon him, would have been stoutly disputed by his neighbors. Mr. Stebbins farmed for pleasure rather than profit, and a part of that pleasure was giving to the needy for miles around. He had inherited a fortune from a great-aunt in England, and along with the money he came into possession of the feeling that those who worked for him had a claim

not completely settled by the wages paid. To this he added the genuine American idea that a faithful worker should receive a living wage. Mr. Stebbins' liberality was the cause of considerable jealousy, for other farmers, who were, it must be confessed, "a trifle near," charged him with spoiling the men. He met their remonstrance with the text, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" The authority was indisputable, and the complainants rested their case. Thaddeus Stebbins was universally respected and had represented his district in the State Legislature several times. This was somewhat remarkable, inasmuch as he belonged to an old Tory family and was more than suspected of being a Tory at heart, in addition to which he believed in ancestors. But his constituents forgave him for the latter, and the village wags had been heard to declare that they, too, would believe in aristocratic relations if they would leave them fortunes. Thaddeus was a regular attendant at the meeting-house, though he was

suspected of favoring Episcopacy, but his wife Abigail saw to it that he did not transgress in this particular. She was an out-and-out Puritan and traced her pedigree to the Brewsters of Mayflower fame. Their children showed the parental bias; for the son became an Episcopal clergyman, while the daughter married a Congregationalist preacher.

Mrs. Stebbins had sent out invitations to a quilting party. This she did every year, and it was well known that the quilt was not for the benefit of her own household, but would be found where it had been sorely needed. The married women came early, the young girls dropped in later, while the male portion of the community were not expected until after supper, when they were at liberty to call for their sweethearts or wives.

Mrs. Stebbins' front room was crowded on this particular afternoon, and not all could be accommodated at one time at the quilting frame. But those who "would jus' as soon rest a bit" were forced to work, amidst much

chaffing and laughter, and to their credit, be it said, that, however fast their tongues flew, their needles flew faster. Mrs. Mansfield spoke first, that is, in a public way, and said, "Mrs. Stebbins will please accept the office conferred upon her at the last quilting party, that of Moderator." The joke was appreciated and work began in good earnest.

It did not take long for conversation to drift to the topic of the Widow Robinson. Nearly every one present had something to add to the general stock of information, but Mrs. Doty let fall the bombshell that staggered the entire company. Mrs. Robinson's liberality had called for favorable remark, when Mrs. Doty broke forth with: "Well, she *ought* to be liberal, for her father owned a slaver and settled $10,000 a year on her if she would leave her husband, who was a graceless scamp living on the prospect of the old man's money."

Mrs. Doty declared that she had it on good authority and repeated her charges more and more emphatically, adding: "And I tell you

another thing. That was her husband who came flying through the village last Thanksgiving Day for the doctor." This was to the suggestion that she might be a widow, in spite of what rumor had said. "No, indeed, she's not," said Mrs. Doty, "and what's more she had oughter to be liberal to make atonement for the sins of her father, as well as of her husband. There wasn't much to choose, I reckon, between them, only the old man happened to have the money. I shouldn't be surprised ef he was pirate, or his father was, anyway."

The company shuddered.

"Did you ever see the hunchback that lives to Seven Acres?" continued the gossip. "She's a frightful-looking creature and I do believe she's a witch. I should be afraid to go to the place after dark."

Mrs. Sutphen expressed sorrow to hear such an account of the Widow Robinson, but she was interrupted by Mrs. Doty, who said, "Don't call her a widow when we all know better."

"Well, then, Mrs. Robinson, if that will

please you," said Mrs. Sutphen, with some little spitefulness in her voice. (People said Mrs. Sutphen was a match for Mrs. Doty any day.) "*I* think she's a good, charitable woman. Did you know she was building those cottages, not to be rented but to be given almost rent free to the factory hands? To be sure, she doesn't meet with us on the Sabbath, and that is against her, but you know, very well, Mrs. Doty, you would not speak of her, even, in that tone if she were here. What you have said may or may not be slander; it is certainly backbiting, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not," said Mrs. Doty; "I've only spoke the truth, and I don't care who knows it."

Mrs. Sutphen's face turned very red, and those who knew her feared an outbreak of a temper that, good Christian that she was, she had much trouble to keep within bounds. Then the peacemakers of the village came to the rescue. The Misses Wardlow were not ashamed of being old maids, and some young

girls who knew them said they, too, would be willing to be spinsters if they could be just like them. Miss Cynthia said, mildly: "I'm another who will stand up for Mrs. Robinson. But I guess she can take care of herself and won't need us to fight her battles. But, Mrs. Doty, the little hunchback isn't half so bad as you seem to think."

"She's jest as God made her," said Miss Clara, the younger sister, a statement which the company genuinely believed and readily explained by their dogma of foreordination.

"You should hear her play on the harp. It's just heavenly!" said Miss Cynthia, ecstatically. "And, do you know, she offered to teach me if I would get an instrument?"

"Why, is she a music teacher?" snapped Mrs. Doty, eager for any new item of information.

"No," said Miss Cynthia," but she is a kind-hearted little creature, and she knew how much I would like to know how. She sings too, divinely, Mrs. Doty. Oh, if only you could hear

her once, you would forget all about the hump! I can't help thinking she and Mrs. Robinson are children of God, even though they don't go to meeting. They may be serving God in their own fashion."

"Queer sort of service," answered Mrs. Doty.

" 'Other sheep have I which are not of this fold,' " said Miss Cynthia, in a soft voice, her eyes downcast.

"Then you believe those folks are Christians, do you? If so, I don't see what's the use of us going to church if we can be just as much Christians without."

"We go to church to hear God's Word and to learn of Christ, so that we shall lay aside all malice and guile and hypocrisy, all envies and evil-speakings." Miss Cynthia's words were not unsteady. They came from a heart that had drunk in the truth for many years, and she would have felt herself a coward not to have spoken her convictions at any time. The room became suddenly quiet, and the rebuke accomplished what its author intended. Miss Cyn-

thia's words were heeded, because her life was known to these simple folk and she lived her religion. Only Mrs. Doty felt called upon to question or turn aside the shaft. "Why," she exclaimed, "you're quite a preacher, I declare. You'll be turnin' Methody, next."

"You know better," replied Miss Clara. "Sister and me could never be that. This isn't meeting, or Sister would never have spoken."

Mrs. Stebbins, as hostess, interfered just here and put in a good word for the Methodists and for Mrs. Robinson and Ruth, and for Mrs. Doty. So, thus mollified, the pleasant chatter about nothing but the all that makes up women's lives went on merrily until supper was announced.

The minister dropped in just then, and was, of course, invited to stay. He remained long enough to ask a blessing, but would not sit down to the meal. With a strange look in his eyes he refused the urgent invitation, say-

ing, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" So he left.

When he had gone, Miss Clara said, "Something's going to happen to our minister. I must tell you about the strange dream I had the other night, about him," she added.

"Don't tell us anything horrid," pleaded Mrs. Stebbins.

"No," said Mrs. Sutphen, "don't tell it, if it's too dreadful."

"It isn't so dreadful, but it's strange," said Miss Clara. "Listen and judge for yourselves:

"I dreamt I saw our pastor standing on the banks of Dragon Creek, and a woman, all in white, stood on the opposite bank, beckoning to him. He seemed to want to go, but there was no way that he could get across. Then he knelt down and prayed. All at once a little girl with flaxen hair appeared, rowing a boat. It crossed the creek, and the child pointed toward Buzzard's Island. Mr. Carter did not speak to her, nor she to him, but he got into the boat and she rowed across. When they

X.

The Man From Dragon Creek.

DEACON FIELDS kept the village store. That may have accounted for his wife's propensity for gossip, for she had the advantage of knowing everything that went on for miles around. It requires a man of unusual amiability to keep the store and yet be popular with his neighbors; for every man who barters believes that sooner or later he will be worsted in a bargain, if he has not already been. Deacon Fields was not popular. He was growing richer every year, which was sufficient proof to his customers that he took advantage of them.

One day, about two years before Mrs. Robinson came to Seven Acres, there appeared in Deacon Fields' store a stranger, who offered game and fish in exchange for a large order.

The deacon refused to trade, remarking, as he did so, that he couldn't be sure the goods offered him "were come by honestly." Nicholas Green, who heard the remark, reminded the storekeeper that the stranger had given voice to no such suspicion concerning *his* stock in hand, at which the company laughed and thought it a good joke and one worth telling on the Deacon.

The stranger, however, took no offence, but paid in cash for his purchases, then inquired the way to the minister's, and went out. He was a striking-looking man, fully six feet in height but well proportioned. His hair and beard, which were dark and curling, were worn very long, so that his appearance was that of an ancient, though a second glance at his face, with its piercing, black eyes, that seemed to cut right into your mind's secrets, contradicted the hasty judgment. His step, also, was so springing that no one would credit him with having passed thirty. He wore loose blue clothes of sailor fashion, but his hands, which were white

and soft, could never have hauled tarred ropes or been exposed to salt wind and water. Moreover, although loose, his clothes were fine in quality and had been cut by a city tailor.

In reply to a question as to his name and where he was bound, he answered, curtly, "Call me Brown Bill. I live in "No Man's Land.' "

His hearers, from Deacon Fields to Tommy Mullins, stood open-mouthed, but the stranger vouchsafed no further information and when the Deacon laid a hand on his arm, a dog that Brown Bill had brought with him and which kept close to his master's side, growled and showed his teeth in such a manner that the Deacon thought discretion the better part of curiosity.

That was on the occasion of his first visit. He came again the next week, and many weeks thereafter, until at last his coming was one of the events of village life. Deacon Fields persisted in his refusal to buy, though not to sell. The minister received weekly visits from the

man, who always left a fine string of fish or some birds or rabbits with the remark that they had been sent. Farmer Stebbins, with his usual generosity, became a regular customer of Brown Bill's. He tried to draw the man out by offering advice or any assistance he might need, but the offer was courteously declined. It was soon noticed that the game sold by this hunter was never trapped, but shot unerringly through the head. Then the boys of the village, who had never taken kindly to the name the man himself suggested, called him William Tell and the old folks shortened it to Tell. By and by he grew less reticent and at last talked freely with one and another, but never about himself. So it fell out that, while he became one of the village institutions, as it were, none could have told anything of his history.

It may seem strange that no one followed him, but a brief account of the place he professed to call his home will dispel that idea. Deacon Fields had put the question to him the

first time he saw him, and he repeated it each time that Brown Bill came until at last the man's patience gave out and he said: "I live in No Man's Land; if it's yours, say so, and I will pay rent." That settled the matter so far as the Deacon was concerned, though he could not lay claim to the property in question. His remarks when thus rebuked were that he never had trusted that man and he "knew he lied when he said he came from where no mortal soul ever come from."

No Man's Land was a desolate tract of some twelve hundred acres, lying northeast of Roxbury. No one claimed it, and it is doubtful whether at this day it has been cleared of timber. Much of the land was swampy and all was thickly wooded. Through the center of the territory ran Dragon Creek, a tributary of the Wells and White Rivers. At Goose Neck the creek was shallow, the depth being not more than two feet, but about Buzzard's Island and at other points there were places where it was practically bottomless. At the island it was

little short of a thousand feet wide. The island itself was some two hundred feet in length by about eight in breadth. These statistics were obtained from Brown Bill's own notes, for none of the inhabitants of Roxbury, or for that matter of the county, ever ventured within two miles of the spot.

It may well be believed that during the half century of Indian wars to which the colonists were subjected prior to the Revolution, No Man's Land was the scene of dark and bloody deeds. The legends of these were, however, pleasant romances compared with the fables invented concerning the neighborhood of Dragon Creek. It was said that fearful storms lashed the brown waters and they cast up strange wreckage, the like of which was never before seen by man. Terrible animals, wild boars, wolves, serpents and what corresponds to the traditional griffin or dragon were reported as at large within the precincts of the waste land. There was a story current that a panther had been tracked thereto, while eagles were accused

of carrying off little children to their nests in the tallest, grimmest tree tops. The simple folk who invented these tales were not troubled with a knowledge of the facts of natural history, and, being safe from contradiction, since no one would venture into No Man's Land, they gave free rein to their imagination. Every dreadful creature, whether antediluvian or amphibious, was believed to dwell somewhere near Dragon Creek. It is small wonder, therefore, that Deacon Fields, whose intelligence compassed all such legends and who believed them in the main, would trust no man who claimed to live in such a place. Nevertheless, the instinct of children led them to make friends with Brown Bill, and Tommy Mullins and certain other reckless characters cherished a secret hope of some day exploring the haunted ground.

The Minister's Disappearance.

XI.

The Minister's Disappearance.

On the night of the quilting party at Farmer Stebbins', just as the guests were preparing to leave, Timothy Dwight rushed in and asked if any one had seen the minister. It will be remembered that Mr. Carter had dropped in, as was his custom, just at tea-time, but had said that he could not remain to eat. Mr. Dwight reported that while passing the minister's house he saw Mrs. Carter peering anxiously out of the window. She had beckoned to him and had asked him if he knew aught of her husband. He had left her in the early morning and had neither returned nor sent word as to the cause of his delay. This was most unusual with him, for he was a man most careful not only for his wife's sake, but for that of his dear people should he be wanted unexpectedly.

As may be supposed, the news caused great excitement and messengers were at once despatched in every direction. Some of the women went straight to the minister's house to assure Mrs. Carter that nothing *could* have happened and to offer to stay with her until her husband's return.

It was nine o'clock when the news of the disappearance was made public. At ten matters began to look serious, and Squire Mead ordered the church bell to be rung as the quickest means to spread the alarm. Every one who could get to the meeting-house was soon there. Old men hobbled to the place, mindful of their youthful days, when the people lived in constant dread of attacks from foraging parties making raids over the Canadian border. Some of the training band took down shot-guns and rusty muskets, hoping wickedly that they might have a chance to display their prowess. Others supposed the call was for a conflagration and were surprised, upon going out into the night, to see no glare in the sky. Some said flood

was threatening, that a dam had broken in the next county, but none of these things could have caused them greater consternation than did the intelligence that their beloved pastor was missing and it was feared he was in sore extremity somewhere.

The farmers offered the use of their horses, and inside of a quarter of an hour twenty animals stood saddled and bridled and ready for the most daring riders. Mr. Stebbins assumed command, by mutual consent, and issued his orders to separate squads and then offered a reward of fifty dollars to the one who should bring good news. The village canon, a relic of the war of 1812, was ordered to be fired as soon as the news was brought in that the minister was safe. This venerable weapon was only used on the Fourth of July. Nicholas Green was its keeper, and he at once got out his powder and ramrod and stood, anxious to give the welcome signal.

The volunteers separated into four companies, and the rest of the villagers went into

the church and held a prayer-meeting. Every house was lit up and had a stranger been passing through Roxbury that night he would have thought there was a general illumination for some great victory; but could he have gone into the houses he would have found many a mother kneeling by her children, praying not for them but for the man who, by some mysterious intuition, was believed to be in deadly peril.

No one thought of going to No Man's Land, but one party, headed by Timothy Dwight, made its way out past Seven Acres. Timothy marshaled his men in true military style; and, as none of the inmates of Providence Cottage had been present at the preparation for the search, it was deemed wise to make inquiries at the house. If the errand had not been of such a serious nature the pompousness with which these rough countrymen addressed themselves to their task would have been ridiculous. But there may be as much real bravery, after all, in facing a savage dog as in marching to the defence of the capital. So Lieutenant Perry

thought when he dismounted and, in spite of the furious barking of Bruce, marched boldly up to the door of Providence Cottage. It flew open so quickly that the lieutenant wondered for the moment whether he had really demanded admission "in the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress," a speech that had been recurring to his mind many a time during his military career. As a matter of fact, Ruth, and old Becky, a colored women who had recently come to live with Mrs. Robinson, were in mortal terror, having heard the alarms and believing the subsequent clatter of hoofs meant evil tidings of the mistress, who, as will be seen, was also missing.

Ruth soon told her visitors of this fact, and the mystery deepened. The men had their own suspicions, which, it is needless to say, were not shared by Ruth. Her story was as follows:

"Sister left here about six o'clock. She went in a wagon, Tommy Mullins driving. I

was not home at the time, but Becky says some one had come for her to go to see a sick woman, and you know Sister would go right away for anything like that. She had been gone about fifteen minutes when I got back. Becky says she went toward the woods."

"Which woods?" asked Timothy.

"That way," answered Nellie, who stood scared and trembling but pointed straight to the east, to the wood on the outskirts of No Man's Land. "I saw Dr. Galen go by just before dark," added she, "and he was driving like a streak. Maybe, he had been sent for to the sick woman. He went just the way Auntie (she had been told to call Mrs. Robinson, 'Auntie) did."

Lieutenant Perry held a hurried consultation with Timothy, and then, thanking the women, they turned their horses toward the desolate place. They entered the forest, and the men dismounted and led their horses. The woods grew dense, and it seemed useless to waste time by one following the other, for so little

space could thus be explored. A halt and a conference, during which volunteers were called for by each leader, and then the rescuers separated, some going north and the others south.

Captain Dwight had been gone but a few minutes when he gave the signal for the others to return. He had seen a bright light ahead, and thought it best that all should be together in case of trouble. They advanced in solid file and raising their lanterns, threw the light well ahead. They saw a wagon and some one in it. Each man grasped his musket as the Captain shouted, "Stop, surrender, or we fire."

Tommy Mullins rose up from the bottom of the wagon and called out, "Don't shoot, it's me, Tommy Mullins; what do you want?"

Timothy ordered the boy to come to him and Tommy obeyed promptly, or as fast as his shaking knees could carry him.

"Where's the minister?" demanded his captor.

"I don't know," said Tommy, "but I guess

lie's with Mrs. Robinson. He went with her and they told me to wait here, and I've been awaitin' ever since, an' it oughter be mornin', an' I'm cold an' yer ain't agoin' to shoot me, be yer?" and the boy blubbered, partly from exhaustion and partly from terror. What he had suffered in that place for four hours, few could understand. That he waited patiently in spite of his superstition and the natural dread that the bravest boy has of the unknown dark made Tommy Mullins a hero in the estimation of his present companions.

Wild thoughts, and some of them wicked, flitted through the brains of Timothy Dwight and his men, but even then confidence in their minister returned triumphant. At last Lieutenant Perry suggested that the minister had been decoyed through the ruse of a dying woman.

"He'd oughter 've knowed there worn't no woman within ten mile of this God-forsaken place," said one man. "That ere widow ain't

no good, mark my words, but the parson ain't to blame, you'll see."

Again the men decided to separate into two companies and prosecute the search. Tommy had somewhat recovered his composure by this time and offered to lead the horse of Captain Dwight in the direction he thought they had walked, though he couldn't be sure, for he had "got so turned around," and he had turned the wagon round once, for he meant to go home, but he didn't.

Tommy led them toward Dragon Creek. The ground was swampy, and the woods were denser as they went on. The men recalled the stories of Egyptian darkness, that which could be felt, and realized, as they had never done before, the terror of Pharaoh. "Boys," said Captain Dwight, solemnly, "I trust we are all prepared to die, for we may be called upon to give up our lives at any moment."

"Ef so be it is to be," said Nicholas Green, "so be it. Ef we're the elect, as I hope we air, we don't have no need to be afraid."

"Amen," said Captain Dwight, and the men pressed forward.

Sam Halstead, a broad-shouldered, muscular young fellow, the champion wrestler of Roxbury, was far in advance of either party and, after half an hour's eager search, shouted to those following that he saw a light. Not receiving an answer to his hallo, he fired his musket, for he knew that would bring his companions up quickly. He was not mistaken, and in a few minutes the company were gathered on the shore of the creek. Suddenly they heard a snorting, and the stories of dragons recurred to them, one and all. But they laughed when they found Dr. Galen's horse tied to a tree. This sign seemed to indicate the genuineness of the sick woman message. The light Sam had seen was across the creek, apparently, but farther along. At last they traced it to Buzzard's Island, but a yawning gulf lay between it and them.

One of the men said he would face the devil to save the minister, and others shared the sen-

timent, and did not take into consideration the shockingly unorthodox manner of expressing it. Captain Dwight and the dare-devil tightened their harness, vaulted into their saddles and prepared to risk a ford. Lieutenant Perry was ordered to remain on the bank, ready to give assistance if it should be needed.

The men believed that Providence directed them to the right spot, for not one of them supposed the creek was fordable lower than Goose Neck, but, in spite of the fact, that there were dangerous holes in the creek and one not far from the crossing made, Sol Hubbard and Captain Dwight struck a place where the water reached barely to their girths.

Arrived at the opposite shore, they saw a cottage. They dismounted, tied their horses and crept softly up to the house, hiding in the shadows, for the door stood wide open. Suddenly, the foremost men stood still, dropping their muskets involuntarily from their shoulders. Instead of thieves and robbers or prisoners gagged and bound, as they had expected to

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discover, they saw in the little room Mrs. Robinson and a group of men kneeling beside a dying woman. Dr. Galen alone stood up, but he was ministering to the sufferer, an aged negress. Mr. Carter was pouring out his soul in intercession for the departing spirit.

"Thank God," said Timothy, fervently, though under his breath, and his men answered "Amen!" in voices that were between a whisper and a growl, though the thanksgiving was as sincere as any that had ever gone up from hearts suddenly relieved.

"You must ride back to the village as fast as your horse can carry you," said Timothy to Lieutenant Perry; and Sol Halstead offered to accompany him in case of accident. It was not enough for these brave men to know the truth; they wished their women folk to be relieved as soon as possible from the fear they had shared with them. Never was ten miles covered in so short a time before or since as it was that night, after the riders had once got

clear of the woods. The relief gun was fired at precisely 2:45 A.M.

The minister returned in the early dawn, Dr. Galen driving him home. Both refused to say anything concerning their experiences, but Dr. Galen told those who asked him that they would know all shortly, and that the minister was so seriously ill that he must not upon any account be disturbed.

XII.

Mourning in Roxbury.

At what time Mrs. Robinson returned to Seven Acres no one knew or cared. The anxiety concerning the minister swallowed up all other considerations. Captain Dwight and his men were, of course, eagerly questioned, but they could not give their neighbors much satisfaction. Some were for raiding Buzzard's Island, at once, but Captain Dwight reminded them of the confidence with which Dr. Galen assured them that they should know all shortly, and of how terribly shaken the minister, who alone could tell the whole story, was, after the night's experience. He urged the good people to wait until Mr. Carter could explain. It is not necessary to say that none of the men accepted Mr. Stebbins' proffered reward. Some-

thing was said about it to them, but the brave fellows were indignant and Captain Dwight said, "Oh, give it to the heathen!"

The little meeting-house was crowded on the Sabbath morning following, not so much because the people wished to hear the young man who had been secured to supply the pulpit as because they wanted to talk with one another and to get the latest news. Church going was a habit with the people, but there were times when more went than usual.

The Rev. Mr. Hopkins came out of the minister's house with a very grave face, and the fervor of his petitions for the restoration to health of their beloved pastor made his hearers uneasy. He took for his text James iv. 11: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren," and stated that it had been the verse selected by their pastor himself and written at the head of his unfinished sermon.

"Don't you think," said Mrs. Doty, "that it was very personal?" But not receiving a satisfactory answer nor any encouragement to her

evident desire to talk scandal, she made no further remarks.

It was some days before any one was permitted to see Mr. Carter, and the first who were allowed to do so reported that the minister's long, black locks had turned grey. He was far too weak to talk, and no reference was made by his visitors to his experience on that fateful night. It was wonderful how all hearts went out in sympathy for him and his deeply afflicted wife. Up to the time that Mrs. Robinson had taken possession of Seven Acres, the minister's salary had been a paltry three hundred a year with occasional donation parties, where the guests ate two-thirds of what they brought. Soon after the widow's arrival, Mr. Carter received a valuable and well-selected library sent from Boston. Mrs. Robinson was supposed to be the donor, though the minister never told the name of his benefactor. Perhaps he did not know, though he could hardly have failed to suspect. What everybody in Roxbury did know was that Tommy Mullins

made frequent calls at the parsonage, and that now the minister was ill, he stopped there every morning and never empty-handed. It must not be thought that the good people allowed the widow to do all for the man. They offered to help with the nursing and delicacies, and cooked provisions for the family were sent in such quantities that Mrs. Carter was able to devote all her time, practically, to the care of the dear invalid.

Meanwhile, the cottages which Mrs. Robinson had ordered were nearing completion. There had no hint been given as to who were to be the occupants. The houses were not pretentious, but they were pretty and comfortable. At a church meeting the fact that they would soon be ready for occupancy was brought up, and Deacon Fields suggested that the church recommend certain families to Mrs. Robinson as worthy objects of her charity.

This letter arrived with several others. In fact the widow's mail had accumulated during her temporary indisposition, for compared with

the minister's, hers could not be called an illness. When she felt able to consider her mail she read and reread the deacon's letter, and with ever-growing indignation. But at last the consummate impudence of the interference struck her as ludicrous and after a hearty laugh she was ready to listen to Ruth's suggestion to answer the communication in a formal manner.

It was no small satisfaction to Deacon Fields, albeit the other church officers felt somewhat shamefaced, that not only four church members were among the beneficiaries, but that four others were among the wickedest in the place. By wicked it must not be thought that they were criminal or hopelessly depraved. Their wickedness consisted mainly in Sabbath-breaking and non-attendance at religious meetings. One other of the fortunates was John Dixon, an Englishman against whom his neighbors had a grievance because of his leanings to Episcopacy. He was a member of the Church of England and longed to see that Church's service introduced into Roxbury.

Being an intelligent man and a good reader, he frequently gathered his neighbors together and read morning prayers for their benefit.

The Rev. Mr. Hopkins continued to supply the pulpit, for Mr. Carter did not rally, though it was not supposed for a long time that he was suffering from anything more than exposure and nervous shock. As a matter of fact the pastor had been ailing for many weeks. He gave no thought whatsoever to his health, and a night spent in the swamp, combined with the excitement, proved to be the finishing touch, and he sank into a low typhoid state which baffled good Dr. Galen. As day after day passed and there was no change, Miss Clara's dream was often rehearsed. So also were the scenes of the last Sabbath that Mr. Carter had served his people. It was a communion service. Just before the singing of the hymn the good pastor said, as he broke the bread, "Jesus died for you." Then he paused, and those watching him saw his countenance change and the face become radiant as he looked upward

and said, ecstatically, "Yes, and He died for me."

The incident was recalled over and over again and was actually on the lips of a little group of the church members one Sabbath evening just at sunset, when they were startled by the tolling of the meeting-house bell. Thirty-two strokes. Every one knew who it was. Yes, the minister had gone to his reward.

It was a sad day for Roxbury when its inhabitants, one and all, young and old, rich and poor, gathered to look their last on the worn face of the sufferer. Some came twenty miles to show their respect, and though it was a busy time of year every farm was allowed to stand idle for the day though the funeral was over fully two hours before sunset.

Mrs. Carter's case was pitiful. She was absolutely penniless and, being a frail, gentle creature, utterly ignorant of anything except household duties, starvation for her children and herself seemed staring her in the face.

But she had not lived with the minister for seven years without imbibing much of his confident trust in Him who has promised to be a father to the fatherless. When fear seized upon her she knew where to seek relief. She was bowed in prayer on the morning after the funeral when her devotions were interrupted by a knock at the door.

Dr. Galen had called to deliver a package and he handed her a large envelope sealed securely with a quantity of wax that gave it a decidedly official appearance. Mrs. Carter trembled so that she could not open it and asked the doctor to come in and examine its contents. These were a letter and an enclosure. The latter was a Certificate of Deposit for Ten Thousand Dollars issued by the United States Trust Company and was in the name of Elizabeth Carter. The letter made no mention of the document but was a sympathetic message signed, "Your friend, Mary Robinson."

Dr. Galen was amazed, but he was a shrewd, kindly man, not without a grim humor and

sense of satisfaction in possessing a secret and likewise in seeing that every man did his duty. He decided instantly that Mrs. Robinson's generosity did not in any way concern the church members, who should be allowed to do their duty by their minister's widow. Under the guise of a possible mistake he recommended Mrs. Carter to say nothing about the certificate except to acknowledge its receipt to Mrs. Robinson. He waited for the church officers to suggest a donation, and Farmer Stebbins set the subscription in motion. A collection was announced for the next Sabbath morning, and it was the largest ever taken in the little meeting-house, for it amounted to one thousand dollars.

Mrs. Carter was anxious to get away from the scene of so much trouble and she decided to go to her friends in Philadelphia. As the distance was so great she distributed her furniture among the poor families who occupied Mrs. Robinson's cottages, taking with her only the books which her husband had prized.

These Nicholas Green boxed for her as "just a little he could do for the poor orphans."

All the village saw the family off. They had no need to buy tickets, for the night before they were to go these were sent to them by the same friend, "Mary Robinson."

Some months later Ruth was seen one day sketching in the graveyard, and a picture of the neat stone erected to the minister's memory was sent to the widow, who wrote that truly her cup was overflowing and that her faith had received more than it deserved, for her heart could not have conceived such kindness.

XIII.

The Mystery is Solved.

AFTER the departure of the minister's widow certain busybodies started the inquiry concerning the events that led up to his death. No one dared to interview Mrs. Robinson, and, with the exception of the doctor, she was the only one in possession of the facts. After a consultation with her Dr. Galen announced that he was prepared to make a statement to the village authorities, but that he declined to make public all the details of the affairs of a lady who was above reproach. It was not until ten years later that the whole story was known. The facts herewith given are compiled from the Doctor's sworn statement and matters of history which the great Civil War served to disclose.

The Mystery is Solved.

Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Crosby were sisters, being the daughters of Captain Josiah Pemberton, of Nantucket. Their mother dying when they were little children, they were placed in charge of Captain Pemberton's sister, who lived in Boston. Miss Pemberton was a godly woman and a strong Abolitionist, and imbued the children with her own views. These were not only heterodox as regards slavery, but also in church matters, for the old lady was a great admirer of Dr. Priestley and of Dr. James Freeman, the first Unitarian minister in the first Unitarian church in New England. She was a regular attendant at King's Chapel, and the little girls went with her.

As the children grew older Miss Pemberton felt the great responsibility more and more. They were heiresses to several fortunes, her own among the number, and this, added to their vivacity, sound education, a fair share of good looks (Anne, the younger, was reputed a beauty) and a singular independence of thought, made their settlement in life a serious

problem. It is needless to say that they had many offers of marriage, some before they were fairly out of the schoolroom, but Auntie stood guard and was determined to protect her charges at any cost. Captain Pemberton saw but little of his children and had every confidence in his sister. He kept a sharp lookout, however, after possible sons-in-law, for he had no notion of having his money squandered, nor his family name, of which he was very proud, brought into disrepute.

At last a suitor presented himself who satisfied the guardian. He was a young man who was loud in his denunciation of slavery, a regular attendant at King's Chapel and a most devoted and humble admirer, quite as much of the old lady as of the young one. Best of all Mary Pemberton sincerely loved him, so all seemed propitious. But when Captain Pemberton was asked for his consent he refused it in terms that could not be mistaken. He wrote a letter to his sister, in which he told her that Jim Robinson was a drunken profli-

gate and that if Mary married him she should, so far as her father's property was concerned, be cut off with a shilling.

The threat made but little impression, for the Robinsons could provide amply for their son and his bride, and although Miss Pemberton made no promise and Mary did not count upon her money, it was generally understood that the spinster's heart was with the lovers and she would make good any deficiency. So, in spite of parental opposition, they were married. The Robinsons were delighted and believed it would be the salvation of James. They welcomed the bride as a daughter, and while her husband lived she was an inmate of their home.

But Captain Pemberton had not made his charges lightly. James Robinson was a profligate, and after two years of misery his wife was providentially freed by his death in a drunken brawl. She returned with her child to the old aunt, but the Robinsons grieved for them and at last persuaded her to make their

house her home. They did not long survive the disgrace of their son's death, and having no other heirs, they left their entire fortune, over a million dollars, to Mary Robinson and her son James.

The second sister, Miss Anne, was not deterred by her sister's unfortunate marriage. She was barely out of her teens when she gave her heart and hand to Robert Crosby, the son of a rich planter in Alabama. Young Crosby was a graduate of Harvard, where he was a universal favorite. Captain Pemberton was pleased with the match, but Auntie entertained grave doubts and feared lest her brother's millions, not to mention her own property, might go to bind the chains of the slave. However, there was no serious opposition to the marriage. While they were on their wedding trip news came to them that Captain Pemberton had been taken dangerously ill in New London, and they hastened thither, arriving only just in time to receive his blessing. They started again with sad hearts, for the captain had been a good

father, and this was indeed a melancholy beginning to their wedded life.

Miss Pemberton soon followed her brother. It seemed as though, having nothing left to do, she dropped out of life calmly and naturally. Her will left the bulk of her property to her niece, Ruth Sowerby, a hunchback and the only child of Miss Pemberton's sister. At her death it was to be equally divided between the daughters of Josiah Pemberton, to wit: Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Crosby. Ruth was deeply attached to Mrs. Robinson, and the two decided to make their home henceforth together. They soon dropped into the habit of calling each other "Sister," and their affection could not have been more genuine had it been born of that closer relationship. The two went to Europe, taking little James with them.

It was during their absence that poor Anne's troubles began. Through long residence at the North and association with the Abolitionists among whom he met his wife, Robert Crosby imbibed an antipathy to slavery. He

secretly resolved to set those on his father's plantation free, should he ever become master, but he did not make his intention known. He had been married about two years when he took his wife South to spend the Christmas holidays. The Crosby estate was well managed in a sense, that is to say, Mr. Crosby was kind to every one in his employ and the abuses of the slave system seldom entered into the conduct of his household. But young Robert knew better than his father did the petty tyranny, the sorrows and the sufferings that entered into the lives of the unfortunate servants. He was determined to make the yoke of slavery as light as possible, and for that purpose watched narrowly. One day he saw the overseer beating a slave cruelly. The man had been long in Colonel Crosby's employ and was not disposed to take orders from a son who had been fooled by Yankees. A fierce altercation ensued, and after language too vile to repeat the overseer so far forgot himself that he struck the young man a blow with the whip

which he had used upon the slave. This was too much for Robert's hot blood. He fell upon the man and in his fury killed him. Mad with remorse, he sought his wife and, without telling her what had happened, kissed her goodbye and fled. Two slaves who had been present at the quarrel, and who were the only witnesses to the murder, went with him, determined to sell their lives dearly for his sake.

Robert was not unfamiliar with the road followed by runaway negroes. Nor was he ignorant of the fact that by accepting the services of his father's slaves he was rendering himself liable to a double risk, for whereas, the murder might not be known, he would nevertheless be suspected of piloting the slaves to freedom and render himself liable to arrest so long as he remained in Southern territory. And what was there to be hoped for, should he reach the place of safety for the negroes? The murderer had no such refuge. No, he was branded like Cain. Had it not been for the thought of his sweet young wife and child

(a babe but a few weeks old), he would have been his own judge and executioner.

The story of their wanderings and hardships would form a chapter twice the length of this. At length they reached a friendly haven, and Robert, hiding his own crime, sought shelter as a deliverer of the slave. So he and they were passed on from station to station until, at the final resting-place, not far from the Canadian border, he at last found courage to tell his story to one whose face bespoke a friendliness that could succor any outcast.

After a night's deliberation his protector, an influential man among the Abolitionists, asked Robert to sign a pledge to devote his life henceforth to the cause. This he did on condition that he should be placed in communication with his wife. He was then led to Buzzard's Island and became Brown Bill to the inhabitants of Roxbury.

True to their agreement, the society who had secured such a valuable ally sent word to Mrs. Crosby, and she, in turn, communicated with

her sister immediately upon her return from Europe. It was thought best that Mrs. Crosby should not become a resident of Roxbury, lest that should arouse suspicion, but Mrs. Robinson leased Seven Acres, that she might be able to keep in touch with her brother-in-law. Mrs. Crosby went frequently to visit Mrs. Robinson, and there her husband met her. The woman who was dying, and for whom Dr. Galen and Mr. Carter had been summoned, was one of the two slaves who had belonged to Colonel Crosby and who fled with the son.

It will be seen how impossible it was to make all the facts public, but enough was told to satisfy village curiosity, and no one knew the whole story until years later, when the Emancipation Proclamation removed all need for secrecy. Robert Crosby believed that he had done penance sufficient to atone for his sin and when once more a free man he removed his family to Boston, whither Mrs. Robinson also went.

Little James of the days of '56 is now Colonel

Robinson. He is a graduate of West Point and when last heard from was doing good service on the Mexican frontier.

Providence Cottage still bears the name which excited so much wonder on the part of the villagers. It is now open only in the summer. Tommy Mullins, sexton of the Congregational meeting-house, and the owner and occupant of as comfortable a little cottage as there is in Roxbury, looks after it in the winter.

THE END.

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